Douglas MacArthur (no relation to the well-known US Army general of the same name) was born 29 August 1920 in Ashland, Wisconsin. His parents both died by the time he was nine, and subsequently, Douglas grew up in an orphan home in Northfield, Minnesota.

Douglas enlisted in the US Army in September 1940, was assigned to a Quartermaster detachment, and volunteered for duty in the Philippines, then a US possession. When the Pacific War started on 8 December 1941, Douglas was stationed on the island of Corregidor, in Manila Bay. Japanese forces quickly defeated the US in the Philippines, and with thousands of others Douglas was taken prisoner in May 1942.

Douglas spent May 1942 – September 1945 as a POW of the Japanese, at these locations (verified through various sources):
Cabanatuan, Philippines, June 1942 – June 1944
Bilibid Prison, Manila, June – July 1944
Freighter Canadian Inventor, transport to Japan, July – September 1944
Coal mine, Island of Honshu, Japan, September 1944 – September 1945

After Japan’s surrender, Douglas was transported back to the United States, where he spent many months at Crile General Hospital in Cleveland, a military facility, recovering from more than three years as a POW. He was finally discharged in August 1946.

Again a civilian, Douglas got married (1946, wife Audrey) and helped to raise three children. He spent a career in sales. At the time of this interview (July 2004), Douglas and Audrey lived in Edina, Minnesota, a Minneapolis suburb.
Interview key:
T = Thomas Saylor
D = Douglas MacArthur
[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation
(***) = words or phrase unclear
NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is 17 July 2004, and this is an interview for the POW Oral History Project with Mr. Douglas MacArthur, at his residence in Edina, Minnesota. My name is Thomas Saylor. First, on the record, Mr. MacArthur, thanks very much for taking time today to speak with me.

D: You’re very welcome.

T: For the record, you were born on 29 August 1920 in Ashland, Wisconsin, and you grew up a number of places. You mentioned being at an orphanage in Northfield, Minnesota, during your junior high and high school age. In September 1940 you volunteered for the US Army, and with all the options available to you when you joined the service, you selected the Philippines.

D: Yes.

T: So what drew you to select that? What made you want to go to the Philippines?

D: I thought it would be beautiful in the tropics. And it was, six months out of the year, weather wise. You know, six months of sunshine, and heat, and all that, and six months of rain.

T: Was the weather hard to get used to for someone like you who grew up in the Upper Midwest?

D: No, I adjusted pretty well. I got used to the humidity, I mean, after all, if I played basketball in the rainy season, under a shelter, it didn’t get to me. I handled that pretty well. And just like when it was the six months of hot sun and so forth, I still ended up playing tennis up when it was 110 or 115 in the shade (laughs). So, really, the elements didn’t bother me.

T: What did you like best about duty in the Philippines, before the war started?

D: Well, I liked that we only worked until noon. It was a half-day deal; you start at seven, or six, and you were done at noon. And then I was free, and then I could do whatever I pleased, and that was usually an activity. I didn’t go up to the PX and drink beer and get soaked up on that stuff, I spent my time in activity. Like I said, in the summertime I played tennis and in the rainy season, basketball. And I bowled
duckpins, and then when the tenpin season started, I bowled tenpins. I was always into sports.

T: In December 1941 the US became involved in the Pacific War. How did you experience the beginning of the Pacific in December 1941?

D: Well, we were sitting ducks on Corregidor. And of course, the Japanese invaded not from open sea, from the China Sea, but they came overland, and came through Bataan. And then of course, they had us in range for everything, from flying bombing, which is where I was injured, and had my injury, it was due to a bombing raid on Corregidor.

T: Before the war actually started in December, what kind of rumors were there among the men about war being imminent? Were people around really surprised, or was the beginning of the war almost something that you expected?

D: Well, me personally, I didn't expect it to fire up, you know, so when it happened, it happened, and I just accepted the fact that we were going to be under siege there on Corregidor, and we obviously had no defense for it. We had a great big, huge gun that pointed out to the China Sea. But it didn’t move in any direction, just the China Sea, and that of course, the Japanese blew up in one of their bombing raids. But all we had was the 155 howitzers to try and protect ourselves from [shelling from] Bataan, and that was small potatoes, that didn’t help us any. So they had us coming and going. They were coming over and dropping bombs, and they were also firing artillery at us. We were sitting ducks. We had no chance whatsoever.

(1, A, 54)

T: How were you injured? You mentioned that a moment ago.

D: I was in a—I tried to find a low spot, a gully, so if the bombs came down I could get below ground level. I made it into the woods, there was some trees there on Corregidor, and I was in the woods, I found a little gully. I laid in the gully on my left side, and I couldn’t get my right side in there, and that’s where I ended up with shrapnel and stuff in my right leg.

T: Were you in the hospital there on Corregidor with that injury?

D: Yes. And the hospital was in the Malinta Tunnel, the big tunnel. Actually, trains ran in there, they brought supplies up or out of it, and then we trucked them. I was in the Quartermaster, so I rode truck and helped deliver supplies to all the emplacements, all over the island. All three levels: top side, middle side, and perimeter, bottom side.

T: How soon before the surrender of Corregidor were you injured?
D: *(pauses five seconds)* It was one of the bombing raids, so it wasn’t too much before the surrender, maybe at the most four to five weeks, something like that.

T: Were you still in the hospital when Corregidor was surrendered?

D: Well, I wasn’t, because it was all packed with wounded, and there really wasn’t, I wasn’t injured that badly that I felt I needed that. One of the guys helped me get back to Malinta Tunnel from middle side on down to bottom side, to the tunnel entrance. So I made it into the tunnel.

T: When the island was surrendered, were you able to walk on your own power?

D: *(laughs)* You didn’t have a choice. In fact, you had to walk past General Wainwright and General whoopy-ding, the Japanese general, with your hands up all the way. If I had had a cane or something I could have used it, yes, but if you were able-bodied enough so that you could walk with your hands up, you had to walk with your hands up.

T: The day of the surrender: what was going through your mind when it was clear the island was going to be surrendered to the Japanese and you were going to become a POW?

D: *(pauses five seconds)* Well, the only thing that went through my mind was, whatever happens, I’m going to get back. And everyplace that I went, no matter what detail I was on, Cabanatuan number one, or two, or three, and I had to work a couple of other details besides, airfields and stuff, repair airfields and stuff like that, before we were shipped out to Japan. That was my attitude: whatever happens, I’ll be back. I was just pure, total confidence. There was just no way I wasn’t going to get back. I didn’t let that enter my mind.

T: How much thinking had you given by the time Corregidor was surrendered, to what it would be like to be a POW? In other words, did you think, “I wonder what’s it like to be a POW?”

D: *(pauses five seconds)* Well, the only thing that went through my mind was, whatever happens, I’m going to get back. And everyplace that I went, no matter what detail I was on, Cabanatuan number one, or two, or three, and I had to work a couple of other details besides, airfields and stuff, repair airfields and stuff like that, before we were shipped out to Japan. That was my attitude: whatever happens, I’ll be back. I was just pure, total confidence. There was just no way I wasn’t going to get back. I didn’t let that enter my mind.

(1, A, 100)

D: I never thought about it. I didn’t worry about it. The only thing that I had in my mind was, whatever happens, I’ll be back. Until the day I got repatriated.

T: When you saw the Japanese there on Corregidor, what impression did they make on you? What did you make of those people?

D: Well, I really didn’t... *(trails off)* My attitude was, I’m Army, they were Army. It was their Army, I was our Army, and what they did, mostly, in most cases, they did what they were required to do, what they were ordered to do. Nothing more, nothing less. And I did what I had to do, which was hold my hands up! And that’s
the way I felt about them: they had a job to do. They were the enemy, but they still had the same ability as a Japanese that I had as an American.

T: So it was a military to military relationship, in your eyes?

D: Yes, well, I knew that they had a job to do, and I knew that my job was over, basically, not totally of course, but I had to go with the flow. I wasn’t going to resist, try anything like that.

T: The soldiers you surrendered to, they were combat troops?

D: Yes.

T: Did they treat you any differently that the guards you encountered later at places like Cabanatuan?

D: Um, we didn’t really have any problems with the guards, believe it or not. At least in my estimation. Now someone else might come up with a different description of the association, but we never really had any great problems with the guards. Even in the coal mines [in Japan].

   When we worked outside on something, I ran into problems with one guy, he was a big Korean, a couple of inches taller than me [DM is 6’2” tall]. I was on duty [in the Philippines], repairing airstrips, and it just so happened we had this lieutenant, or captain, who was a graduate of graduate of Stanford University. He had come home to Japan to visit his family, and he got caught there. He ran a good detail camp, you know, because I called this big Korean, I called him a son of a bitch *(laughs)*, and he came charging at me. And the lieutenant just said a couple of words, and stopped the stampede. Otherwise he could have killed me so easily, because he was so huge.

(1, A, 155)

T: Did you run into Korean guards more than once?

D: No, he was the only Korean that I remember running into, other than in the mines [in Japan]. In the mines we had Koreans too. They were, you might say, forced labor too. They weren’t any different than us, basically, in any sense of the word. The Koreans we ran into, they were outside, they worked with us. They ran the detail under the Americanized Stanford graduate *(laughs).*

T: So the Koreans worked under the Japanese.

D: And there were some big ones. I’m big, but some of them were bigger than I was *(laughs).* Some of them.
T: When you were first captured there on Corregidor, Mr. MacArthur, did the Japanese search you or question you at all?

D: No, they didn’t search us there, and as I recall, somehow or another I got some money, and I had some American money. I don’t know where I kept it, I can’t remember, but I had it when I ended up in camp Cabanatuan number three. That’s after the transport to Manila, where they let us off in the water to walk to shore and then hike into Manila, to Bilibid Prison. Real American money.

T: Was money useful as a POW?

D: As long as you could hold onto it.

T: So what could you do with money in your situation?

D: There were Filipinos that would take a chance, and sell you stuff. In other words, what I bought, what I needed so desperately, were round cakes of sugar, about an inch thick (indicates with fingers).

T: Softball sized, an inch thick or so.

D: I’d buy that through the fence, from the Filipinos. If they got caught, the Japanese killed them immediately.

T: For them the money was attractive—

D: —and for us the food.

(A, 1, 187)

T: Where did the Japanese keep you there on Corregidor, before they moved you off the island, off the Rock?

D: We weren’t on Corregidor very long before they started hiking us in another direction, off of Corregidor. Then we were taken by boat up to that point where you could jump in the water and swim to shore. We were taken way outside of Manila, and then we were force marched all the way to Bilibid Prison, which was in Manila. We were at Bilibid before we went to Cabanatuan, but it was just an overnight. We weren’t inside, as a matter of fact we bivouacked, or whatever you want to call it, outside, on the grounds. They were just holding us there for the night, and then we were marched to a rail yard and taken by boxcar, packed in like sardines. We went so far, to the end of the rail line, and then from then on we were force marched the rest of the way up to Cabanatuan [camp] number three.

T: Cabanatuan [camp] number three is where you spent more than two years as a POW.
D: Two and a half years.

T: The longest period of time anywhere, right?

D: Yes. That’s where my feet got ruined. They took our shoes away at the gate, we had to leave them inside the gate, and went out without shoes. They made us work, hauling rocks, four on a corner on these great big bamboo racks. We had to load them up with boulders, and with no shoes on. I don’t know how long this went on for, all I know is I ruined my feet.

T: Were there a number of work details there at Cabanatuan [camp] number three?

D: Yes.

T: This is one of the ones you were on?

D: Yes. This was clearing various boulder sizes, four on a corner, like I said, on the bamboo racks, and they were big bamboo racks. The rack was so wide *(motions with arms, five or six feet)*, and probably about five or six feet long, and it was four on a corner. We had to load the racks, then we had to lift them. We had to haul them barefooted, all that weight, and deposit them wherever they said to deposit them. I don’t remember where we deposited them, but we were clearing fields. We were hauling all the boulders out of the fields. We were clearing the area for planting, so that they could plant food.

*(A, 1, 237)*

T: How heavy were the racks you four guys were carrying? Can you estimate?

D: Oh, geez *(laughs).* I tell you, they [the racks we were carrying] were monstrous. They were so heavy. It was hard physical work.

T: This is a detail you went on from camp, in the morning?

D: Yes.

T: Generally the same guys every day?

D: We didn’t say a hell of a lot, we just worked.

T: I want to ask about the camp there at Cabanatuan number three. What kind of barracks, or quarters did you have there?

D: Well, when we first got there, before we started work detail, we slept underneath the barracks, because there wasn’t any room in the barracks. They had to clear
room and everything. So regardless of weather, we had to sleep underneath the barracks. And then when we got into the barracks finally, we had bamboo bunks, two levels. So there was some up, and some down. No mattresses; you slept on bamboo.

T: Like bunks against the wall, one up and one down?

D: Yes, pretty much.

T: Were you in those quarters the whole time you were at Cabanatuan [camp] number three?

D: Until a certain number of us were sent to... I’m trying to think of the name of that field that we went to. It wasn’t Nichols Field, that was off in a different direction. We were still on Luzon. But that was the one where this [Japanese] lieutenant was, the Stanford grad. I tell you, that was a piece of luck, you know really. The work wasn’t so great, but it was a piece of luck to have a person like that.

T: Who from your description was pretty decent, all things considered.

D: Yes, he was, very much so. He was very protective of us, too.

T: And not all the Japanese were.

D: No, they weren’t all like that.

T: The rock clearing detail, what’s another work detail you can remember from there at Cabanatuan [camp] number three?

D: (pauses five seconds) Well, we got marched to the river, so we could bathe in that filthy river (laughs).

T: Bathing, how often did that happen?

D: Couple times a week. We were marched down to the river, it wasn’t that far from the compound where we were.

T: On work details, were there rice paddies that you remember working in?

D: No, we didn’t get involved in anything like that.

T: Any agricultural work that you recall?

D: No, we didn’t get into that. No construction, no planting. Well, we didn’t end up with any of that. They were other areas, though.
T: It sounds like this clearing of land was something you did for an extended period of time.

D: Yes, that was about two and a half years of that.

T: Same work detail, it sounds like, about the whole time there.

D: Yes. That’s why I was laid out on a bench with three guys sitting on me, they had what was called mess kit surgery. I developed stone bruises on my feet. It was all the stones and stuff we had to walk on. Actually what they were, they were infections, they were pockets. They caused swelling on the bottoms, which was the infection. It hurt like hell. The heels, I had them on the heel and I had them here (points to ball of foot), and right in the center. And all of those had to be, they had to break the pus pockets, and the only way they could do it is lay me on a bench and have three guys sitting on top of me and have a hunk of wood in my mouth. Cause it hurt like sin, and no Novocain, no nothing to kill the pain. They just went in there with this sharpened mess kit knife and just gouged out all those pus pockets. In all three locations. Both feet.

T: Even though you knew the operation, such as it was, was going to hurt, the pus pockets were so bad that you...

(A, 1, 330)

D: When they were through all I could do was get some bandages on the feet, but you still had your weight to walk on, you didn’t, there wasn’t anything you could do, you know.

T: Did they recur? Did you have that problem more than once?

D: Yes. When I finally got back to the States, when I was in Crile General Hospital, I had, I had electric rods to burn them out. They burned them out with electric rods.

T: They had come back again and again, these stone bruises.

D: Oh yes. Electric rods, but that didn’t work, and then I had acid on the bottom of my feet. No Novocain. And that was at Crile General Hospital.

T: And you were there for months I think you said, in 1945 and 1946.

D: Yes.

T: How did they finally take care of your feet?
D: Let’s see... They never did get them properly corrected, totally, even though they actually did surgical removal. Actually went in and surgically removed every one of them, all three places, on the heel, on the side, and on the pad.

T: How have your feet been since 1946?

D: Well, they don't bother me anymore now, but for quite some time after, yes...

**End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.**

T: Was the VA helpful after you were discharged?

D: When we got back to the States, I ended up in Letterman General Hospital, in San Francisco—we came into Frisco instead of Seattle. The ship wasn't going to make it there, so we headed into Frisco and made it to port there. And then in Letterman General Hospital, there in San Francisco, they did some work on my feet, but it didn’t do the trick. And I hadn’t fattened up by then.

T: On weight, how much did you weigh there on Corregidor, before you became a POW?

D: Oh, about 150 pounds, that’s all.

T: So you were a slender build.

D: Yes, but I was athletic, I was strong, muscular. Took a hell of a lot to get me down.

T: Were your feet the main physical problem you suffered as a POW, both in the Philippines and in Japan?

D: Pretty much so, yes. They were a problem forever, it seemed.

T: Did you have any problem with malaria, or beriberi, or any of those?

D: Yes, I had malaria, and I had dysentery. I had so many things it wasn't funny *(laughs).*

T: With all the physical things that bothered you, how did that impact your sense of determination, your optimism that you described earlier? Make it tougher?

D: No, I wasn’t going to let it get me. I was determined, from the day we were captured, that I was going to make it back home in one piece, even if was only part of me. And when they finally picked me up I was only ninety-five pounds.

*(1, B, 25)*
T: You were in a lot of different locations, among them Cabanatuan, a hell ship to Japan, and also in Japan. As you looked around you, were there other guys who weren’t as successful at having a sense of determination or optimism?

D: Once we got off the train, the boxcars took us so far, and we were force marched the rest of the way up to Cabanatuan. We buried quite a number of guys on the way up. If you can call it burying, because the water table was so high, like this far (holds hands one foot apart) and you’re already in water. Oh, less than one foot. So we’d dig a hole, put the body in, fill the dirt on top and hope for the best. You know, they’re open to scavengers and so forth, whatever animals are around. And a lot of those were those guys that did all the muscle stuff, you know the muscle guys. But they were also the guys that drank a lot of beer at the PX, so they might have been big, but they weren’t strong. I mean, they didn’t have the determination to make it. (pauses three seconds) We just buried them.

T: So you think being in shape may have helped you make it, as opposed to bigger guys who weren’t in as good shape.

D: Well, I always maintained a regimen of considerable activity. Bowling, basketball, tennis in hundred degree weather—as long as I could find somebody to play with! (laughs) So I was always active, very willowy. I wasn’t heavy, but I was rigid, I was strong. I was in good physical shape when I was captured.

T: Let me ask a question about Cabanatuan. As a POW there, talk about the kind of food that was provided every day.

D: Rice (laughs). Just rice. Three times a day. And if you could get next to the cooks, in the kitchen, you could get some of the burnt layer that was going to be thrown away anyhow. A few pieces of that, just to get something to eat.

T: What can you say about portions?

D: I was losing weight, but it still took a long time for them to get me down to ninety-five pounds.

(1, B, 63)

T: Was it possible, there at Cabanatuan in the Philippines, to get, to scavenge any other kind of food for yourselves?

D: Well, if there was anything moving, we’d grab it. If we could catch it. Snakes, whatever.

T: Any interaction with Filipinos as far as them providing you with food?
D: They took their life in their hands if they did anything. And some did lose their lives. You know, they would be selling us something and they’d get caught. We didn’t get killed, but they did. They knew it was a gamble, and some of them lost. The Japanese were willing to shoot them just as well as shoot us if we were standing around loose and it looked like we were going to head for the hills. It’s the first thing they’d do would be to shoot you, they wouldn’t bother to capture you.

T: Let me ask about escape—was that something that people talked about? Realistically?

D: I never talked about it, I guarantee you, because I knew there was no place I could go and have much of a chance to exist. You had nothing to go on—you had no rations to take with you, there’s no way to take any food. It wasn’t that easy to escape. You knew dang well if you went outside the perimeter, and got outside the perimeter, you wouldn’t make it. If some Filipino didn’t turn you in, the Japs would get you one way or the other.

T: So while it may have been a thought, it sounds like it wasn’t a realistic idea.

D: Right.

T: Now the guards there at Cabanatuan. Did you go through different guards, did they come and go, or did you see pretty much the same guard faces?

D: Well, I don’t remember the guards there at Cabanatuan, because I really didn’t have anything to do with them outside of the fact that we were following motion orders of what to do, you know. When you had to take your shoes off at the gate, you knew you had to do it, and you headed through the gate barefooted. Then you got four on a corner on these big bamboo racks and you loaded them up with boulders, and we did that for two and a half years, for goodness sakes.

T: When you were working, were the guards nearby or were they more in the background, just watching?

D: Well, they didn’t need many guards. You might have twenty-five guys working a detail in a particular area, and believe me, all you needed was one or two, just the presence. What chance would you have?

T: Did you see them much in the camp, in the barracks?

D: No, not in the barracks.

(1, B, 100)

T: The treatment of prisoners by the Japanese: from what you saw, did you witness guards physically abusing prisoners?
D: Some, yes. In Cabanatuan.

T: What did you see specifically, what kind of abuse?

D: They would beat up on, on some of the guys, if they looked cross-eyed at them. If they just looked like they were going to make a move, why, that’s all it took. You didn’t have to do anything, really. I don’t mean it was as simple as just looking cross-eyed, but nobody with a brain was going to try to escape. But a couple did try, and they were killed. So that took care of that, it gave everybody a lesson.

T: What rules can you remember, rules that if you didn’t follow you could expect to get punished?

D: (laughs) I didn’t break any rules, I wanted to get back. But if you had to lift a lot of stuff, you didn’t have any choice, the bamboo racks.

T: The POWs you were with, were there guys you were closer to, or better friends with, than other guys?

D: (pauses three seconds) There was just this one guy that I was with there at Cabanatuan, this truck driver I told you about before we started the interview, and he got back to the States too.

T: Was he in your barracks there at Cabanatuan?

D: No, but we were in touch. We were pretty much in the same area of buildings. We were actually in buildings, on our bamboo beds.

T: Did you see him on a regular, daily basis?

(1, B, 150)

D: Pretty much.

T: Were there people that you, maybe, helped each other if you could? Friends?

D: (pauses five seconds) You had to do what you had to do, and you didn’t have anybody else to do it with you, for sure. You didn’t have the same guys all the time on the same detail, so it wasn’t always...

T: So different guys, perhaps, from day to day that you worked with?

D: There were a number of barracks, quite a few barracks. We had 2500 guys at least, so you scatter those and it makes quite a few barracks. It was a pretty good sized compound there at Cabanatuan number three.
T: Same guys in your barracks there most of the time?

D: Yes, pretty much.

T: Some guys in the barracks that you’d consider friends, for example if you were feeling poorly they might fetch your rice for you, something like that?

D: I didn’t have that situation, but I don’t know if they’d let somebody bring somebody else something.

T: Mealtime you got your own food.

D: Yes.

T: I meant to ask you about your name. I mean, you are Douglas MacArthur, and that’s the name of perhaps the best-known American military figure in the entire Pacific War. Did the Japanese ever pick up on that?

D: Yes, they did. And of course, their name for him was (pronouncing like Japanese speaker) “Macassa” (repeats, animated). When they found out my name, “Macassa,” like they were going to beat the hell out of me! (laughs)

T: Do you feel you got bad treatment from the Japanese because of your name?

D: Not really, because I’ll tell you, I steered clear as much as I could, if that was a possibility. I wouldn’t go near them if I had any, any reasoning in my mind.

(1, B, 185)

T: Was it possible to stay away from them?

D: Oh yes.

T: Sounds like a survival strategy, laying low really.

D: Exactly.

T: From what you saw, did some guys seem to get that, to understand that, better than others, how to make it through?

D: Yes. But there were a lot that learned the hard way. And there were a lot that were smart enough to do things right.

T: While you were at Cabanatuan, was it possible to follow how the war was going, outside of your little world there? Were there rumors, or hard news?
D: Nothing. No word at all. No news, period.

T: And rumors?

D: I could tell a rumor from news.

T: When you heard a rumor about something, about how the war was going, and you knew it probably was just a rumor, did you kind of want to believe it anyway sometimes?

D: I never heard any of those rumors, how the war was going. I didn’t pay any attention. I can safely say I don’t recall hearing any rumors of how the war was going, because how the hell did any of these guys know how the war was going? So why listen to them.

T: Now eventually, in 1944, you were moved from Cabanatuan, to Japan, on a ship.

D: That’s right.

T: How much advance warning did you have that you were going to be moving from Cabanatuan?

D: I didn’t really know it until, we were on this detail, not at Cabanatuan, but on a detail where we were clearing an airfield. Same kind of work, but a different place. That’s where this lieutenant was, the Stanford grad.

T: So you were there at this particular facility when you got the word that –

D: —from Cabanatuan to that detail, we were moved to that detail.

T: And it was from that detail that you were moved to Japan?

D: Almost directly, yes. We ended up in Bilibid Prison for a week or ten days, something like that, until the ship that we were going on was, was there to take a group.

T: So you had some notice that you were going to be leaving Cabanatuan, or…?

D: Well, when I left Cabanatuan it was to go on this work detail, this clearing the airfield—what was the name of that place?

T: Clark Field?

D: Maybe. Clark Field.
T: Did you end up going back to Cabanatuan before you were sent on the ship and left for Japan?

D: No, I didn’t go back to Cabanatuan. From Clark Field, (laughs) where you had to shake your shoes off because of the scorpions. I put my foot in once, and boy did I pull it out in a hurry. It almost got me. There were scorpions there—their tails sticking up there, waiting to zing you. I’ll tell you, after one trial run, and you didn’t get stung, you never tried it again before you shook your shoes real good before you ever tried to put them on. Golly are they scary.

T: Other bugs, insects, those kind of things while you were a POW?

D: I’m sure there were plenty of those around, but I don’t remember. The scorpions I was very well aware of, though.

T: So you didn’t get sent back to Cabanatuan, but instead, all of you, or most of you, were transported to Japan.

D: Eventually just about everybody, I guess. I don’t know exactly how many, but we had a boatload. And when I say a boatload, it was a boatload. You see, salt was an essential item and very valuable to the Japanese. So we went on this Mati Maru, or whatever, and it was a salt tub. We were sitting on, laying on salt all the way over there. We picked the boat up in Manila harbor, that’s where we were shipped, put aboard.

[NOTE: Based on information collected, the ship was almost certainly the Canadian Inventor, which sailed from Manila on 4 July 1944 with 1100 men packed in two holds. After a sixty-two day journey it pulled into Moji, Japan on 1 September 1944. See Gregory Michno, Death on the Hellships (Naval Institute Press, 2001) 179-82.]

T: Any estimate from you how many guys were loaded aboard that ship?

D: (pauses three seconds) Well, the hold was so full of salt, I don’t think there were any more than forty or fifty guys in there. I mean, how much room you got? We were on top of the salt.

T: What do you remember about the journey from Manila to Japan?

D: Well, we barely escaped being torpedoed by our own people, by one of our own submarines. I don’t how we knew, we made it into Formosa, the port there, we weren’t in there long, but we made it into Formosa. And then from there we were, the ship continued on with escort.

T: On the same ship?
D: Same ship.

T: You didn’t change ships at all?

D: No. Same ship. Same guys.

T: What were the conditions like in the hold there, where you were being kept?

D: They were salty. That’s not funny, is it? (laughs)

T: All Americans in there, as you remember?

D: We had a few Limeys, a few English, I mean.

T: Not all Americans then?

D: Allied POWs. Some Canadians, some British.

T: Were they all at Cabanatuan, do you know, or were they on that work detail at Clark Field?

D: They were brought to that, but they weren’t in any of the details I was in. They were brought to that port, to be shipped out. We had, for about a week we were in Bilibid Prison, and that was just a prison. About a week.

T: How long would you estimate that you were on the ship from Manila to Japan?

(1, B, 315)

D: We had to do some ducking and dodging, so…and they let us above deck, not standing on deck, but just to get a little air every once in a while, and we were close to, but fortunately not hit by, one of our submarines. We were fortunate that we weren’t sunk. We saw a number of Japanese ships when we hit Formosa, that were in port, that were just really shot up.

T: Knowing that submarines were out there, and maybe carrier planes, did that sit on your mind? I mean, you’re on this ship, and…

D: I didn’t let it enter the picture. I just didn’t let it bother me. Could have driven you nuts, but I wasn’t about to let it.

T: Of the guys that got on that ship, did everybody survive and get off?

D: Yes.

T: For you, what was the most difficult thing about that ship transport?
D: I’ll tell you, you can smell just so much salt. And it’s all hard, too, it’s not like the stuff that comes out of a shaker. It’s rock salt. That’s what we slept on, all the way to Japan.

T: Talk about the food.

D: Well, there was excess that they would come down with.

T: They lowered it down?

D: Yes.

T: Same with the banjo, or whatever they used for as toilet facility?

D: Yes.

T: Well, let me ask about your time in Japan. You spent your one year there working on the main island of Honshu, right?

(1, B, 355)

D: Yes, up in the mountains.

T: Geographically, where on the island were you, do you know?

D: I was trying to think of the name of the port that we came in to. It was either Moji or Shimonoseki, one of the two.

T: And they’re across from each other, right where Honshu and Kyushu almost meet, aren’t they?

D: Yes, right. And then we were put aboard sort of a rail line, in railroad cars.

T: Still the small group of guys that you remember from the ship?

D: Well, I’m trying to think how many ended up going up there. (pauses three seconds) You know, that’s a long time ago (laughs). I know there was a mixture of nationalities in the mines, but not a big—

**End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.**

T: Do you remember when you arrived in Japan? We know it was 1944.
D: I remember the month that we were going to finally be released. The war was over on August 29 [1945], and weren't released until September 15, so I was there a year. We must have got to Japan in September.

[NOTE: The Canadian Inventor arrived in Moji on 1 September 1944.]

T: Now, your only work location in Japan was in the coal mines, right?

D: Yes, that's right.

T: Okay, so we know when you arrived in Japan, where you arrived, where you worked, and that you went by train to get there.

D: Took the train right on up the mountain. Honshu is the biggest island.

T: Talk about the conditions at the coal mine. Did you stay at barracks at the mine itself, or were you at a place where you had to walk or be trained to work every day?

D: We walked to the mines. The one nice thing about there was, they didn't have, we didn't go by names, we went by numbers.

T: Different from Cabanatuan, then?

D: Yes. Names there.

T: So at the coal mine you had a POW number.

D: Right, a number.

T: Did you have to know that number in Japanese?


T: So your number was 342.

D: (repeats Japanese phrase)

T: So you had to know that number in Japanese?

D: Oh yes. You had to spell it out rapidly, spit it out in a hurry, or get whopped.

T: Did you pick up other Japanese words and phrases while you were a POW?

D: I didn't even attempt to learn Japanese.

T: But did it get to the point that if you heard a word you knew what it meant?
D: Only if it was something that wasn’t good. Then I could recognize it.

T: Now what kind of barracks were provided there on Honshu, where you stayed?

D: They were open air barracks, in the wintertime they would be enclosed then.

T: Like the walls were removable?

D: They were temporary, they were removable. They were enclosed in the wintertime. We had, to lay on we had, *(pauses five seconds)* I think they gave us some kind of material to lay on. And it had a blanket.

T: Let me ask about food there.

D: When we were up there in the mountains we got rice for breakfast, we had rice before we left. We got, for lunch we got a bento box, about the size of a cigarette pack *(motions with hands about two inches square)*. That you could pack in it what you were having for lunch. You could pack it right in there *(packing motions with hands)*. And we had a miniature loaf of bread, about so big *(motions with hands four or five inches long)*, and about that wide *(motions with hands one or two inches)*, and about that tall *(motions with hands one or two inches)*. That was dinner.

T: That was bread?

D: Yes, it was a bread. We had rice before we left, and we packed rice in a bento box, that’s a lunch box.

T: When you got back—

D: —we got the bread. We had something to eat three times a day.

*(2, A, 50)*

T: Talk, if you would, about the work you did at the coal mine. Earlier you said that you walked up the mountain, and then going down inside the mountain.

D: We walked to the opening, and all the equipment of the mine, like the tram that took us down, all the equipment, all the belting for moving coal, it was all US made. It was US equipment. We built up Japan. Then when we killed them, we built them up again *(laughs)*.

T: So older US industrial equipment that you’re using.

D: Yes.
T: You were transported down from the pit opening onto the coal face with a railroad, or was it walking?

D: It was an angle, like so (*motions with hands downward*).

T: Sort of sloping downhill.

D: Yes. And I think it held about sixteen or twenty guys, each unit that went down. They were sort of like cars, but sixteen or twenty guys, they were still pretty good size. And then of course we had to walk, stooped, they weren’t made for big Americans. They really weren’t made for big Koreans, either (*laughs*). But that isn’t where we ran into the big Koreans.

T: When this train stopped then, you had to walk to the actual coal face.

D: We had to, once it got down to that level, which took about twenty minutes to reach that level. We were well into the mountain, I mean, really. Then we walked about seven to eight levels, shafts, below that, to get into the working areas where we were digging.

T: Did it get warmer as you went underground?

D: Once you got down to the bottom, that was it, I mean, there was no difference in temperature once you started walking down.

T: What kind of actual work were you doing once you got in there?

D: You were raking coal and shoveling it into, it was a tram, like...

T: Like oar cars?

D: Yes, that type of thing. They weren’t great big, because it was, the space wasn’t that large for, like you would find in US mines. But we would load them up.

T: Were these oar cars pushed out, or powered out?

D: They were powered out.

T: What about the tools you used?

D: The guy that had the pick was a Jap with a pointy cap. And he had one of those things. We loaded with shovels.

T: So you guys were the heavy labor, so to speak.

D: Yes.
T: How did you your work vary down there? Do different things?

D: It was pretty much the same thing every day.

T: Did you work every day, that you recall?

D: No, we had a couple of days that we didn’t work. I don’t remember what days they were.

T: But you worked a couple of days and then had a day off?

D: Yes. I don’t remember just how many days we had, for some reason or other I just have the feeling that we had a couple of days off. But I can’t be positive if we worked seven days or five.

T: Now if you did have a day off, what might you do?

D: Sleep.

T: Speaking about how the war was going, earlier you said that in the Philippines it was hard to get any news, in Japan, for example, did you ever see American planes go over, or have any indication that things were going different.

D: Yes, when I heard the bombs falling. Even down in the mines we could hear that.

T: Do you know what big city might have been nearby?

D: I think that we weren’t all that far from Hiroshima.

T: So it was possible to hear the effects of Japanese bombing.

D: Oh yes.

T: Which must have suggested that the war was going better for the Allies and badly for the Japanese.

D: Yes.

T: Did you, the prisoners as a whole, wonder or worry about what might happen to you all if the Japanese did lose the war?

(2, A, 110)

D: I never worried about it myself. I don't know what the other guys thought about it.
T: From what you heard, did guys talk about it?

D: I knew that once our planes were going over it was going that it was in our favor. And they were careful when they bombed; they knew the locations of where the camps were. Like when we were up in the mountains there on Honshu, they knew where we were. We did, eventually they dropped supplies to us, once the war was over.

T: So if they dropped supplies, they knew your location obviously.

D: That’s right.

T: How did you experience, or learn about, the end of the war? How did you actually find out from the Japanese?

D: We started working outdoors, instead of in the mine. We were doing garden work, and we fertilized the garden. You know how we fertilized the gardens?

T: Human fertilizer?

D: Absolutely. Right out of the toilet, out of the backhouse, the double header.

T: So your work changed there at the end.

D: Yes.

T: Did the Japanese, that you recall, make any kind of an announcement that the war was over?

D: We had officers in the camp up there on Honshu, and when they, when we could see that things were working for them then obviously things were changing for us. So that’s when we didn’t go into the mines anymore, we hauled this piss and shit fertilizer to the food we were going to be able to eat *(laughs)*. That was it for the mines, after that. We didn’t go back in the mines. Once we were out, we were out. But it was two weeks before they came and got us. But they dropped supplies.

T: I guess you had to make sure you weren’t standing underneath when the supplies were dropped? *(laughs)*

D: Thank goodness, generally we were pretty safe *(laughs)*. If they dropped the stuff, and it landed on these flimsy barracks that we lived in, I don’t know what would have happened. They landed, it must have been pretty precise. Bombing with food *(laughs)*.

T: What happened to the Japanese guards, the staff of the camp there?
D: They disappeared. Then we had American officers.

T: Did Americans come into camp to escort you out, is that what happened?

D: No, we rode the tram down, the train. It was open, I mean, they weren’t closed cars, they were open, there were windows. We were put on those and rode down to the port. To Moji or Shimonoseki, I forget which. We were picked up by, put aboard a hospital ship. Damned if I know which one, but it was a hospital ship. That was nice duty there, until they dumped us on Formosa.

Then we were flown from Formosa to outside of Manila, flown by airplane, on stretchers, each person on a stretcher. We’re back in the Philippines again. Then the Air Force offered to fly every one of us back to the States, and the Army says, no, you’re not flying the boys back, we’re going to feed them, get them fattened up. So for two weeks we got fed food, they kept us in tents there, we were outside of Manila.

(2, A, 175)

T: Do you get any kind of debriefing by the Army, where they ask you questions about your POW experience, or were they just sort of feeding you and fattening you up?

D: No, we never went through anything like that. At least I don’t remember them asking anything. I’m sure when we got to Crile General Hospital in the States, when we got cross country at Crile General Hospital, there was probably some questions going on, but I don’t remember.

T: Now that was weeks later. Did you take a ship from the Philippines back to the US?

D: Yes, they put us on a slow boat to, it was going to Seattle but we couldn’t make it there, so we had to end up going to Frisco. They offered to fly us all back, every one of us, and that stinking Army, that cheap ass Army I was in, wouldn’t...

T: Did they give you medical care on board the ship back?

D: No, there was nothing. We were forgotten souls. Matter of fact, we were on the third hold below deck. And all the Limeys and all the Canadians and all the Aussies, they were up on the first and second deck, and we were on the third hold below deck. So we were treated really royally, you know, horseshit, you know. I went topside as often as I could, just to get air.

T: Were you all POWs there?

D: Yes. But more than one nationality.
T: Eventually you made it back though *(laughs).*

D: *(laughs)* Yes, I’m here talking to you.

T: You were in the service as a volunteer. Did you ever consider staying and making the service a career?

D: Not once I got well enough to arrange for a discharge. I had all of that I wanted. I went through two processes to get discharged. The first place I went to was Letterman General in San Francisco for two weeks.

T: You didn’t have folks to visit back in the States, you had siblings?

D: I had two sisters and a brother that were alive.

T: Did you see them once you got back?

D: Not right away.

T: Now you were married in June 1946, even before you were discharged.

D: Right.

T: How much did your wife, Audrey, know about your POW experience? Something that you talked about?

D: She didn’t know nothing.

T: She knew you had been a POW?

D: That’s it. We didn’t get into, I didn’t get into it. And she had a feeling that I didn’t want to talk about it anyhow, so… It was kind of mutual.

T: Sounds like she didn’t ask and you didn’t tell.

D: Yes.

T: Sounds like the subject sort of sat there, you both knew it was there, but it wasn’t something you talked about.

D: Yes. Don’t ask, don’t tell.

T: What about your three children as they were growing up? What did they know?
D: For a lot of years they didn’t know nothing. They knew I was a veteran, but that’s all they knew. I didn’t talk about it at all.

T: So what’s changed for you over the years then? I mean, you’ve been very gracious with your time here today with me, and we are talking about it.

D: Well, (pauses five seconds) I guess I mellowed.

T: Does that mean you see yourself as a different kind of person than you were in 1946?

D: I feel a lot better, I do. And I’ve mellowed a lot. I can talk about it. It doesn’t bother me. Some people it might bother, if that bothers them, then they got a problem. I don’t have a problem, I can talk about it.

T: But you saying this wasn’t always the case?

D: No, not always. 

(2, A, 250)

T: Was there an event, or some person, that changed that for you?

D: (pauses five seconds) I’ll be darned if I know. I’m just a good sport, that’s all. It wasn’t overnight. But it’s been a long time since I’ve talked about it to anybody, for that matter.

T: Did you receive any help, or counseling, from the VA?

D: Yes, the first person I had wasn’t the best person. He’s the one that I said, if there was no such thing as Clark Field [the place where DM did detail work in the Philippines]. But then after him I saw Dr Posey, and he actually came from out there. He came from that area where Crile General Hospital was.

T: This is 1946 now.

D: Yes.

T: But he was more helpful than the first person you talked to.

D: Yes, very much so.

T: Since you’ve been out of the service, has the VA been much help for you?

D: I was rated one hundred percent disabled. It wasn’t the “permanent and total” that I have now, it was one hundred percent. I had access to just about anything at
the VA when I had a problem, so it’s been no problem. Dental, meds, I always get my medications from the VA.

T: Have you been one hundred percent for a while?

D: I was one hundred percent a long time ago. But it was just five years ago that I was re-rated as one hundred percent permanent and totally disabled, a level above that not everybody gets. As a result my income increased, over double what it was before, almost three times. If anything comes up, I can get what I need at the VA.

T: Does your VA offer any kind of counseling services, where you can go, like a self-help group for ex-POWs, that you’ve taken part in?

D: Yes, I’ve done that at the Minneapolis VA. I used to go with a group, Dr. Engdahl. I was part of that group for quite a while, but it’s also quite a while since I did. He’s a real nice guy.

T: Helpful too?

D: Yes.

T: When you got back from overseas, how often did you have dreams or flashbacks about things that happened to you as a POW?

(2, B, 340)

D: I didn’t hit my wife very many times, I can guarantee you that, if at all. Dreaming is one thing, but I was never physically thrashing in bed, kicking my wife, stuff like that.

T: Did the dreaming go away over time, or something that you still have periodically?

D: Periodically it comes back, yes. I shake it off.

T: Easier to shake it off than it used to be?

D: Yes. I developed a lot of self-control.

T: What do you mean by that?

D: (pauses five seconds) Well, I can talk about something, or I don’t have to, or I won’t talk about something. (pauses three seconds) It depends on the mood I’m in (laughs).

T: Does that mean you can take something that’s bothering you and sort of put it in a box and not think about it?
D: Pretty much. Put it behind me.

**End of Side A. Tape 2, Side B begins at counter 000.**

D: I don’t allow myself to do that. I just have enough control, so I don’t allow myself. I just won’t do it.

T: Are there certain parts of your POW experience that are easier to let come back and think about than other parts?

D: It’s been so long ago, there aren’t any parts that I’m thinking about.

T: In other words, it isn’t something that during the course of a normal day, you would think about.

D: No, that’s right.

T: And people like me come along, we dredge things up.

D: I can talk, you know, and it doesn’t bother me.

T: Now, you used to attend the once a month lunch at the Richfield VFW, the lunch with former POWs of the Japanese.

D: I used to go, but there are just certain people in the group that won’t let it lie. And I’m not interested in thrashing it all over again, I don’t need it. It’s history and I want to leave it there. I don’t want to get into the conversations, and I don’t want to listen to it either, so I quit going. I don’t want to.

T: A final question: when you think of your POW experience, how would you describe the most important way that it changed you as a person?

D: *(pauses five seconds)* Well, I never, people say, I bet you really hate the Japanese. I don’t hate them. Why should I hate them? Their duty was the same duty I had, so why should I hate them?

T: Did you hate them after the war at all?

D: No, I’ve never hated them, because in my mind they were doing their job and I was doing mine. I just got the other end of the stick, that’s all. It’s a casualty of being a soldier. It’s part of what you bargain for. You don’t bargain for it, but if it happens, it’s because, it’s going to happen. I was Regular Army [a volunteer], I joined the Army in September 1940.

T: Do you have any desire to go back to Japan, to visit?
D: To Japan? No. The Philippines? No. Neither one. I want nothing to do with either one of them. It's over. I don’t need to go back there and go through Malinta Tunnel, or whatever, you know. It’s gone. Just let it be. It’s history, and I’m not interested in history.

T: That’s the last question I had, Mr. MacArthur, so on the record let me thank you very much for your time this evening. I’ll turn the machine off.

END OF INTERVIEW